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Orchestrating Delivery: How Planners Can Partner with Developers to Build 1.5 Million Homes

Delivering 1.5 million homes by 2030 will be the biggest test of England's planning system in a generation. Building on their new [Political Quarterly article](#), Nancy Holman and Alan Mace argue that securing this pledge means moving beyond a narrow focus on targets and enforcement, and equipping local authorities with the practical tools to partner with developers as genuine delivery agents.

Reframing planning reform

Traditionally, reform debates have treated planning delivery as a classic principal-agent problem: Whitehall sets housing targets, then seeks to ensure that local planning authorities comply. Recent tweaks to the National Planning Policy Framework—reinstating mandatory local targets, introducing buffers against under-delivery, and enabling default permission where land supply falls short—strengthen those top-down controls. But Holman and Mace point out that built-in flexibilities (elected-member discretion, public consultation, negotiated section 106 agreements) are vital democratic safeguards and will always allow a minority of “unwilling” authorities to slow matters down, however tight the targets.

The authors do not recommend eliminating democratic safeguards or radically altering the UK discretionary planning system, instead they contend that local authorities should be equipped with new tools needed to engage developers as genuine delivery partners.

The missing “orchestrator” toolbox

What's been missing, the authors contend, is a complementary set of incentives that enables local authorities to act as orchestrators—actively shaping development proposals and sharing risk, rather than simply enforcing rules. Four areas deserve attention:

- **Incentive-based instruments:** Reform of planning gains to reward faster delivery of genuinely affordable units, rather than simply extracting higher contributions.

- **Risk-sharing mechanisms:** Infrastructure advance funding, guarantees or pooled finance vehicles to de-risk large-scale sites, especially on the urban fringes.
- **Strategic land assembly:** Empowering councils to pool public-sector land parcels into viable development opportunities, reducing speculative land-banking.
- **Structured delivery partnerships:** Formal frameworks for Homes England, local authorities and institutional investors to co-design and co-invest in mixed-tenure projects that meet both volume and quality objectives.

Why balanced governance matters

Holman and Mace emphasise that none of these tools require eroding democratic accountability. Instead, they work with existing governance arrangements—preserving local consultation and political debate—while aligning the incentives of all actors. In a high-cost, land-constrained market, developers need both certainty and support to programme complex schemes. Likewise, communities benefit when planning authorities can offer a tangible stake in outcomes, rather than just wielding a veto.

A roadmap for practitioners and policymakers

For planners and policymakers, the message is clear: to hit the 1.5 million-home target, we must combine robust principal–agent levers with a richer orchestrator toolkit. That means rethinking how we fund and structure delivery, and forging new partnerships across public and private sectors. By doing so, we can preserve the democratic strengths of our system while turning ambition into bricks and mortar.

Read the full article at doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13551

About the author



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Alan Mace is Associate Professor of Urban Planning Studies at LSE. Before joining LSE in 2010, he worked as a spatial planner in London on policy development. He also has considerable experience of community involvement in planning. He combined this with his role as senior lecturer at the University of Westminster, before which he was a research fellow at UCL.



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